

DEVELOPING THE SPEAKING SKILL FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS THROUGH ORAL PRESENTATION

Nguyen Phuong Thanh, Truong Van Tuan

College of Commerce; phuongthanh210@gmail.com

Vietnam Korea Friendship Information Technology College; trglamtuan2110@gmail.com

Abstract - Speaking is one of the skills that EFL learners find it difficult to achieve. This can be applied to EFL students whose majors are not English. However, the speaking competence is really necessary for students after graduating from universities due to the job requirements in the global integration time. Therefore, it is comparative that there should be certain strategies to help students develop their speaking skill. Recently, oral presentation has been employed for this purpose, yet there have been different ideas about its real effects on students as well as ways of exploiting it. This investigation was carried out to explore this issue from the perspectives of teachers and students. The results show that oral presentation activities are essential for students' speaking enhancement, and oral presentation does have a great impact on students' vocabulary, pronunciation, and confidence which are crucial for their speaking performance. Moreover, ways of carrying out oral presentation for the best results have also been suggested.

Key words - speaking skill; speaking competence; oral presentation; communicative activities; develop students' speaking skill.

1. Introduction

English, as an international language in the world, makes it possible for people to access international friendships, new technology, and international markets (Nguyen, 2013). Thus, English has been playing an important role in the development of Vietnam, especially in the context of increasing global integration. In fact, "the ability to communicate effectively in English is a decisive factor that helps a person to fulfill their responsibilities and succeed when working for or with multinational companies." (Nguyen, 2013, p. 710) This is the reason why the teaching and learning of English, especially students' speaking skill, have been paid much attention. As one of the requirements of the age for integration, English speaking skill is a must to non-English major students after graduating if their goal is to integrate fully into the international world of business. However, the fact that students' English level is still low is an alarming issue. According to Le (2013), the surveys conducted by five key universities in 2005 revealed that the majority of students' real English level was just elementary. Moreover, students' speaking competence is still a matter of great concern. One of the reasons of this matter is the current ways of training which are still test-driven and teacher-centered. Students do not have adequate time for their oral practice. There is a need of a more communicative method of teaching so that students can develop their speaking skill. One of the suggested communicative and student-centered activities teachers can employ to encourage students' speaking is oral presentation whereby students have to use oral language to present their ideas and interact with their peers and the teacher. This strategy has more or less been exploited by a number of teachers with the hope to help students enhance their oral competence. However, its real effect is still a question to teachers.

To gain more insights into the effective utilization of this teaching strategy, a research entitled "Developing the speaking skill for non-English major students through oral presentation" was carried out with the research questions:

1. Is oral presentation really necessary to the development of non-English major students' speaking ability?
2. How does oral presentation help students develop their speaking skill?
3. How should presentation activities be employed to help students develop their speaking skill?

The outcomes of this investigation will help teachers answer these questions, and hence help contribute to the finding of solutions to students' inability of speaking English effectively, which is the current concern of language teachers, educators, and relevant agencies and bodies.

2. Speaking skill and the nature of speaking skill development

The ultimate aim of learning a language is to be able to communicate in that language. Therefore, speaking is one of the most desired skills. However, teaching and learning speaking is quite difficult. Shumin (1997) contended "learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammar and vocabulary." (as cited in Khameis, 2007, p. 111). Speaking skill is acquired through learners' interaction with one another (Khameis, 2007). In fact, natural and real situations help push students to speak English naturally. Moreover, students are able to speak well when they are motivated to speak. Students' motivation can be enhanced when students are interested in the activities or the topics or when they have good knowledge about what they speak. Students' motivation is also activated when they have good preparation about what they are going to speak in front of their peers.

3. Different ideas about the relationship between oral presentations versus speaking skill

Oral presentation can be in either short or long form which can be delivered either individually or as part of a group. Students may have to use visual aids such as PowerPoint slides, posters, and pictures to support their spoken language. While participating in the presentation activities, students present and explain the content as well as answer the listeners' questions. In turn, the listeners will also have the chance to speak when asking questions or giving comments. Can the activities of oral presentation provide students with such motivation stimuli mentioned above?

There have been different viewpoints about the utilization of oral presentation in teaching students. Erkaya

(2011) believes the role of oral presentation is so crucial to students' speaking skill development that "[the] course is not complete...until instructors teach students oral presentation skills." She states, "[o]ral presentation skills are an extension of oral communication skills: the former deals with planned usage of language; and the latter, mostly with unplanned usage of language." Besides helping to bridge the gap between language study and language use, developing students' skills of collecting and organizing information, and enhancing students' collaborative work, oral presentation enables students to use language skills (King, 2002), especially the speaking skill. In contrast, a number of teachers question the appropriateness of this communicative activity in different culture contexts as this is originally a mainly Western approach which may not be suitable for Asian students. King (2002) argues that "presentations can be a face-threatening activity, particularly for some Asian students" (p. 404), and therefore "speaking in public sometimes actually undermined students' confidence and is ineffective in developing students' oral proficiency because students were put on the spot" (p.403).

From the fact, it can be seen that, oral presentation is theoretically an effective strategy for improving students' ability of speaking. Nonetheless, if not well-managed, this type of activity may have negative results that are demotivation and the antithesis of what has been expected before. Therefore, there is a need to find the best way to help students with their doing oral presentations. Anticipating the problems that may happen as mentioned above, King (2002) suggests some solutions that can be done from the teacher's side. She emphasizes the teachers' role in helping students cope with their speech anxiety by having students' open discussions about this phenomenon and the treatment for it. Teachers are also recommended to avoid group boredom by reminding presenters about using eye contact and communicative languages to the live audience. Students are believed to be taught the presentation skill, too. Other roles of the teacher in giving outlines, grouping and scheduling students' presentations, assisting students to choose topics and gather information, preparing students' about how to handle technical problems, holding Q & A sections, and finally preparing evaluation forms, are also suggested by King (2002). However, there have not been any solutions derived from the perspectives of students who are also an important part of the teaching and learning procedure. Therefore, this research seeks the answers from the angle of students' perceptions and opinions to find the last puzzle piece for a complete picture.

4. Methods and procedures

The research was carried out in the setting of Duy Tan University, one of the biggest private universities in Central Vietnam, where English is a compulsory subject for students of non-English major. The participants in this research were 47 non-English major students from the two EFL classes. They were third-year students participating in advanced-level EFL classes, but most of them felt reluctant to express their ideas in English.

To get deep insights into the issues and responses from students, an investigation was carried out in the light of a qualitative approach. Such a qualitative study helps to understand students' viewpoints and perspectives about their learning experiences since in this type of study "[t]he key concern is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspectives, not the researcher's" (Merriam, 1998, p.6, as cited in Ramírez, 2010). For data collection in this qualitative study, at the beginning of the semester, the participants were divided into groups of 2 or 3, and presentation topics were assigned to them. Then, at the beginning of every class time, from 2 to 3 groups students in turn did their presentation with their chosen topics. The presentation activities lasted for one semester. Additionally, observations, questionnaires, and interviews were also employed as research instruments.

5. Findings and discussion

5.1. The necessity of oral presentations to non-English major students' speaking skill improvement

From the data collected, 46 out of 47 the participants (comprising 98% of the data pool), when asked about the necessity of oral presentations, agreed that oral presentations should be included in EFL classes for non-English major students, and only one of them said "Don't know". Of these 46 students approving the utilization of oral presentations, 28 students contended that such activities had helped them develop their speaking skill with confidence in front of other people, and the rest asserted that these activities assisted them to improve their English, including their English vocabulary and pronunciation, which in turn also benefited their speaking skill. In general, when approving of oral presentations, all of the students believed that these activities provided them opportunities to improve their English, especially confident speaking.

Table 1. Student's opinions about the necessity of oral presentation in non-English EFL classes

Students' opinion	No of students	Percentage %
Yes	36	98
No	0	0
Don't know	1	2

This once again confirms most teachers' belief about the effectiveness of oral presentation to students' speaking competence as mentioned earlier.

5.2. The impact of oral presentation

Data analysis showed that all of the students, when asked about the usefulness of their presentations for their speaking skill, contended that the presentation activities had more or less positive impacts upon their speaking competence. Their opinions of the helpfulness level of oral presentations varied from *a little* (with 4 students-8.5%) to *so so* (8 students-17%), *helpful* (29 students-61.7%) and *very much* (6 students-12.8%). The highest percentage fell into the group of students who said that presentations were helpful to them. None of these participants denied the positive effects of oral presentations. These data once again proved the helpfulness of presenting in front of the class.

Particularly, when questioned about how exactly oral presentations benefited them, 100% of the participants agreed that these activities were beneficial to them more or less. Specifically, 96% of the subjects believed their experience with oral speaking in front of their class made them more confident when speaking English, and 41 out of 47 students (87%) said that these activities helped them improve their pronunciation. Regarding the improvement of their speaking fluency, 32 students (about 68%) admitted the positive influence of oral presentations on their speaking fluency.

Especially, approximately 60% of the students (28 students) contended that oral presentations helped them develop in all three aspects suggested in the questionnaire form: pronunciation, confidence, and fluency. Fifteen subjects said that oral presentations could be beneficial to them in two aspects, and only 4 of them found just one benefit out of the three aspects from oral presentations.

Table 2. Student's sharing about the impact of oral presentations on their oral competence

	Have more confidence	Improve pronunciation	Gain fluency
28 students (59.6%)	√ (x28)	√ (x28)	√ (x28)
11 students (23.4%)	√ (x11)	√ (x11)	
4 students (8.5%)	√ (x4)		√ (x4)
2 students (4.25%)	√ (x2)		
2 students (4.25%)		√ (x2)	
Total (n=47)	45 students (96%)	41 students (87%)	32 students (68%)

In a later interview, the participants confirmed that to prepare for their presentations in class, they had had to search for information in order to have the most proper content. During this process, they learnt a lot more vocabulary. They also had to practice presenting in advance at home, and through these steps, they had to adjust their pronunciation and gained the fluency in their speaking. This shows that oral presentation requires students to work not only in class but also at home. The requirements of the work pushed them to practice more at home, which may not be done without the oral presentation tasks. In this way, oral presentation tasks instrumentally motivated students to practice their speaking skills. Furthermore, some students also added that correct pronunciation was also learnt through the teacher's feedback after students' presentations.

Observations from the teacher also showed that students of the later presentations were more confident than those of the earlier times. Moreover, the ways the students expressed their ideas in their oral presentations were more logical and smoother than those presenting earlier. These observations indicated that students not only learned to adjust their speaking from their own experiences but also from their peers'. This kind of learning experience is another positive effect of oral presentations. It is worth noticing that the students here were just given one chance to speak in front of the class during the research time. For just one time, they believed that presentations had effectively influenced their speaking performance. Hence,

the repetitions of this kind of activity can create a multiplied effect on students' speaking skill.

In short, the data from the research proved the effectiveness of oral presentations. Most of the students taking part in the research indicated that they did obtain advantages from their experiences with their presenting tasks in front of the class.

5.3. Effective ways of exploiting presentation activities

How to exploit presentation activities was also one of the concerns of the research. Therefore, participants were also asked to give their viewpoints about this aspect. When questioned about how often should students be given a chance to perform oral presentations in front of the class with the purpose of improving their speaking ability, the majority of the students agreed that the frequency number should be at least two. Interestingly, the numbers of students thinking that the number of frequency should be two, three, and more than three were the same (13 students for each group). From the data, we can see that students believed there should be repetitions of the time of presenting times for the purpose of training their speaking skill. For that reason, teachers should pay attention to multiplying students' times of doing oral presentations to help them get the best opportunities to improve their speaking skill.

Table 3. Student's perspectives about the frequency of oral presentations in each semester.

Level of frequency	No of students	Percentage%
Once a semester	8	17.02
Twice a semester	13	27.66
Three times a semester	13	27.66
> Three times a semester	13	27.66

As the 47 students were asked about using notes when presenting, 17% of them (8 students) did not agree with this strategy, citing this was not useful for their speaking skill because speakers would depend on the notes and became passive and uncreative in their presentation. In contrast, 83% of the participants (39 students) supported the use of notes when speaking. The reason for this, cited by a number of supporters, was that notes reduced speakers' anxiety and increased their confidence and fluency since notes served as a reference when presenters forgot words or ideas. However, the other supporters of the use of notes did not approve of the abuse of notes, explaining that presenters should refer to their notes occasionally when really necessary. Otherwise, students just relied on the notes and could not develop their speaking skill. It can be seen that students themselves were well-aware of this matter to the development of their oral competence. Therefore, the appropriate use of notes should be one of the presentation assessment criteria that the teacher needs to inform students prior to their presentations to help develop their speaking skill instead of standing in front of the class and reading the notes.

Regarding visual aids and technical assistance, e.g. PowerPoint, only two students showed their indifference, choosing *Don't know*, and one student mentioned the use of other kinds of technical assistance. On the other hand,

96% of the participants showed their referring using PowerPoint when doing presentations. These participants believed that PowerPoint allowed presenters to be more professional and confident because PowerPoint enabled presenters to be more active as well as to have more attractive and persuasive presentations with illustration and visual aids, such as pictures and diagrams. Moreover, they contended that PowerPoint also assisted the listeners to easily follow the flow of the presentation. For them, if the use of notes just assisted the presenter, then PowerPoint gave assistance to both the presenter and listeners. All of these factors just served an aim that was to help the speaker to gain confidence and hence fluency when speaking. Furthermore, 62% of the students approved that only a certain percentage, not all, of the content of their presentation should be displayed on the slides, citing that too much information on the slides would bore the listeners and would not promote students' creativity when speaking.

5.4. Other strategies besides oral presentations that can help students develop their speaking skill

For further references, the students were also asked to show their opinions about what other activities, besides oral presentation, should be employed to help them improve their speaking skill. A wide range of activities were listed by the students, with *listening to and learning English songs* being listed by the most students (22 students) and the three ideas *practicing the listening skill more*, *watching videos of speaking situations*, as well as *joining English clubs* coming last (2 students for each idea). The idea ranking the second highest was *playing games* in which grammatical points, sentence patterns and vocabulary were the focus with 21 students listed. This idea was followed by *working in pairs/ groups* with 8 students supporting. Consequently, 4 participants thought that *watching films with subtitles* could also help them improve their speaking skills.

Table 4. Student's suggestions about other activities that can be employed to help them develop the speaking skill

Activities suggested	No of students	Percent-age
Listening to and learning English songs	22	47
Playing games	21	45
Working in pairs/ groups	8	17
Watching films with subtitles	4	8.5
Practicing the listening skill more	2	4.25
Watching videos of speaking situations	2	4.25
Joining English clubs	2	4.25

Especially, as can be seen from the data, songs and games were still of the students' preference. This is good news for teachers because they are the most popular and the easiest-to-apply techniques. Further research is needed to work out the best possible or most appropriate way to apply these different techniques in teaching students the oral presentation skill.

6. Conclusion

There have been different ideas about the application of oral presentation in helping students' to develop their

speaking skills in EFL setting. However, in the analysis above, it has been found that oral presentations are essential activities in non-English major EFL classes because they do have positive impact on the development of students' speaking skill. Oral presentations were found to help improve students' vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking fluency, and confidence, which are important elements for good speaking. Moreover, proper ways of carrying out this type of activity were also suggested. Teachers and students who have proper preparation and organization would benefit from this learning experience, and this can be an enjoyable learning activity which helps teacher and students to take a break from textbooks for a while. In addition, it has been showed that, besides oral presentation activities, teachers should also apply other interesting communicative activities, including songs and games in their teaching periods to help develop students' oral competence. It is hoped that teachers, with experience from their teaching plus what has been found in the research here from students' perspectives, can guide their students properly for the best results of their speaking skill improvement.

The research time was limited, the data pool was small, and each student was given just one chance to do their presentation in front of the class during the investigation. Therefore, the results may not reflect the most general effect of oral presentations on students' speaking. However, it is hoped that the findings provide certain insights about the utilization of oral presentations in EFL non-English major classes seen from the angle of students so that teachers can be aware of how students think and need as well as what they can gain from oral presentations. Future research may investigate how to effectively combine oral presentations with other communicative activities for the best improvement of students' speaking.

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